

Sky Soldiers defeat Mediterranean Sea, 2-1

Defenders duel, Sky Soldiers win

Story by

Pfc. Brandon R. Aird, 173rd Public Affairs

The 173rd Airborne Brigade's soccer team, Sky Soldiers, stopped the aggressive offense of the Turkmen Mediterranean Sea soccer team in the final minutes of the game to give the Sky Soldiers a 2-1 victory in Kirkuk, Iraq June 13.

The game started with Col. Bill Mayville winning the coin toss for the Sky Soldiers in front of a crowd of 3,000 (mostly Turkmen) whom showed up to watch the game in spite of sweltering temperature. The fervent crowd came prepared with drums and flags to support their home team (named Mediterranean Sea).

The first half was a defenders duel, with each teams defense stepping up to plate and stopping the other. At the end of the first half both teams were scoreless.

During the halftime a paratrooper in full battle rattle jogged around the field with the Sky Soldiers flag causing quite a commotion. The paratrooper stopped and another one picked up the American Flag and started jogging around the track that circled the soccer field. The Turkmen had watched enough and a runner emerged from the crowd with a Turkmen Flag and started chasing the paratrooper. The crowd cheered as the Turkmen flag raced toward the American Flag. The Turkmen caught up to the paratrooper and started to pass him, but the paratrooper held his ground. The race was on. The paratrooper stayed even with the Turkmen for ¼ of mile before falling behind. Then another paratrooper again in full battle rattle emerged from the crowd, and acquired the American flag from his counterpart, and raced toward the Turkmen flag. Then an adolescent emerged from the crowd with an Iraq flag a raced side by side with paratrooper. All three flags caught up with each other. The Turkmen gave his flag to the paratrooper, and the paratrooper gave his flag to the adolescent, and adolescent gave his flag to Turkmen. For the first time since Saddam Hussein came into power an Iraq flag, an American flag and a Turkmen flag ran side by side with a crowd well over 3,000 cheering them on.

The second half started off with Sky Soldiers scoring the first goal of the game. Sky Soldiers striker, Damel Fall, head-butted the ball above the head of Abut Halik, Mediterranean Sea goalie. The Americans out numbered 15-1 in the crowd could be heard cheering over the Turkmen crowd's discontent.

A few minutes later Sky Soldiers struck again with Albert Padilla scoring a goal with a light kick with the side of his left foot that sent the ball bouncing into the goal giving the Sky Soldier a 2-0 lead. After the Sky Soldiers scored their second goal the Turkmen crowd started leaving the stadium early in anticipation of defeat.

But the game wasn't over yet; the Mediterranean Sea got a chance to avoid the Sky Soldier's defense with a penalty kick. Abdul Vahid took the free kick and scored the Mediterranean Sea's first and last goal with a blast to the upper right corner making the score 2-1.

The Sky Soldier defense controlled the last 10 minutes of the game denying the Mediterranean Sea offense a chance to score another goal.

The high-pitched sound of the referee's whistle marked the end of the game, and the first victory for the Sky Soldiers against an Iraq team. The win brings the Sky Soldier's team record in Iraq to 1-1.